

# **She's got the bare necessities; B.C. polar bear Agee bringing realistic touch to films in age of CGI**

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**Byline:** Victoria Ahearn, The Canadian Press

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## **Body**

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Canadian film star Agee is a bit of a diva at work.

She travels to movie sets in a 12-metre-long trailer that has a wading pool on hot days, and doesn't like co-stars or crew near her while she prepares for her scenes.

The 24-year-old also gives "stink eye" to anyone onset who talks to her manager, Mark Dumas, except for his wife, Dawn, the only other person Agee will tolerate while working.

"I have a wife and a mistress," says Dumas, referring to Dawn and Agee.

"My mistress is 800 pounds, blond and cranky."

Agee's behaviour is understandable. After all, she is an apex predator - a polar bear, to be exact.

The Abbotsford, B.C.-based bear has starred in a variety of screen projects, the latest being the survival drama Arctic, directed by Joe Penna.

Opening Friday in Toronto and other cities in subsequent weeks, Arctic stars Danish actor Mads Mikkelsen as the sole survivor of a plane crash in a remote and snowy area of the frigid North.

But work for Agee and other animals is slowing down in the film world as CGI takes over.

"Which is a shame," says Dumas, who feels viewers are missing out on seeing "the majesty of such an incredible animal."

"CGI, to me, is a cartoon. The animals don't look as real."

In Arctic, Agee appears in a scene involving a cave and, while she looks ferocious, it's all an act.

"She's trained to open her mouth and show her teeth. She doesn't make any noise," says Dumas, noting her roar in the film was added in post-production.

She does have sass behind the scenes, though.

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"She's very selective on who she likes and who she doesn't like," says Dumas, noting no one is allowed into her working space that's surrounded by a thin electric wire fence onset.

"When I go away, she is a little upset and when I come back she'll actually blow me off. If Dawn's there she'll go over and say hi to Dawn, love up to Dawn and then look at me like, 'You've been gone.'" Agee shot her Arctic role about a year ago in a warehouse in Abbotsford.

Her other credits include the 2014 Norwegian children's drama Operation Arctic and 1996's Alaska with Charlton Heston, which was her first movie. She also has her own Facebook page, Agee the Polar Bear.

Dumas, who has been an animal coordinator and trainer for 47 years, got Agee specifically for Alaska when she was two months old from the Kolmarden Wildlife Park zoo in Sweden in 1995.

He trained her through positive reinforcement with the primary goal of making her a part of the family.

"I make a commitment to these animals," says Dumas, who has had various creatures on his four-hectare property over the years, including a grizzly bear, cougars, deer, wolves and eagles.

"They work for me and then I work for them. You just don't work 'em and throw 'em away. You're with them or they're with you for the rest of their lives."

Agee has her own swimming pool and pen on the Dumas property, with the option to roam around on the grass as she sees fit.

She's never been bred, and enjoys a diet of everything from chicken and salmon to pizza and Thai food.

Agee views Dawn like a "sister" and is so close to Dumas, he's been able to stick his head into her mouth. The couple also sometimes swims with Agee.

When asked what he has to say to animal rights groups who think such creatures shouldn't be in captivity, Dumas said: "If you saw the relationship I have with Agee, you'd be a fool to say that she is having a hard life. She really has it nice."

"If Agee were ill treated, I wouldn't be able to lay down with her, swim with her and train her," he added.

"When I pull her trailer in front of her cage, she gets excited. It's something that she likes to do. That happens because she is treated with a lot of respect."

Dumas was born in Los Angeles and says he "fell into" animal training while working on the lion ranch of an acquaintance's father.

"It's a lifestyle," said Dumas, adding he's not in it for the money. "If I figured out what I've made throughout my life, I've probably averaged about five cents an hour.

"You raise the animal from a baby, you spend a lot of time with it and no one's paying you to do it - you just do it. And it's a love you have." !@COPYRIGHT=© 2019 Osprey Media Group Inc. All rights reserved.

## Graphic

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Mark Dumas, The Canadian Press; Polar bear Agee is shown on the set for the film Arctic, in a handout photo.;

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